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ABSTRACT

The information and activities in this guide are intended to help teachers provide senior high school students with assistance in test taking skills. The activities described in the guide focus on the development of positive attitudes toward testing, an understanding of the reasons for tests, and creating environments conducive to successful test taking. Sections of the guide discuss (1) the kinds of tests senior high school students take, including descriptions of specific, system-wide standardized tests like the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills; (2) teacher attitudes for effective instruction in test-taking skills; (3) the things teachers can do to prepare for test administration; (4) student preparation for taking tests; (5) a list of common key words used in essay questions, with explanations for advice on how to respond to them as directions. Appendixes contain samples of test answer sheets, a selected bibliography on tests and test wiseness, a school self-evaluation form for improving student test-taking skills, and a teacher check list on test administration and student preparation for taking tests. (RL)

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Guidelines For The Teaching of Test Taking Skills - Senior High

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Prince George's County Public Schools
Upper Marlboro, Maryland 20870
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The following committee members participated in the preparation of the material included in this booklet.

Mrs. Anne McKown, Instructional Coordinator

Dr. Jack Cole, Coordinating Supervisor of Reading

Mrs. Ida Rogers, Assistant Supervisor of Guidance

Ms. Judy Spitman, Counselor, DuVal Senior High School

Ms. Johnnette Kennedy, Reading Teacher, Frederick Douglass Senior High School

Ms. Susan McKeon, Counselor, Laurel Senior High School

Ms. Barbara Haigh, Assistant in Special Education/Placement

Mr. Frank Landrum, Assistant Supervisor of Library Media Services

Ms. Sallie Fitts, Supervisor of Business Education

Dr. Elwood Loh, Supervisor of Evaluation and Research

Mrs. Eremein Jackson, English Specialist

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Introduction

Senior high school students in Prince George's County Public Schools are exposed to test-taking on a daily basis. They need to continue their preparations so that they will be more adequately prepared to take all types of tests for career opportunities or advancement in further schooling following graduation from high school.

Students who have the knowledge needed to perform well on tests do not always do so because of factors other than knowledge of content. Often tests do not measure what a student knows, but how well that student can use various test-taking skills. While skills to improve test-taking can be listed, teaching those skills in isolation will not be of great benefit to students. Educators must take advantage of the many opportunities to integrate the teaching and reinforcement of test-taking skills in regular instruction and its evaluation.

There are many factors in addition to knowledge which influence test performance. Physical health, motivation, emotional state, and test-taking skills play a part in the outcome of the test. Research studies have indicated that a pupil who understands the directions on a test, can handle the mechanics of recording answers, is not overly anxious, and is motivated for the task, will probably receive higher scores than other pupils with the same knowledge but without these characteristics.

Test-taking skills can be taught and reinforced by structuring teacher developed activities to reflect similar formats of tests and to require thinking strategies which might be required to answer test questions. The improvement of student test-taking skills includes the development of positive attitudes towards testing, and an understanding of the reasons for tests, and creating environments which are conducive to successful test-taking.

As a school system, we are dedicated to providing test-taking skill assistance to the senior high school students. Our responsibility is to provide them the skills to succeed on tests in school or in their future lives.

Senior High School Tests

Each senior high school student will take at least a minimum number of tests during this/her time spent in the secondary school program. Some of the tests may be teacher constructed, but students will also be required to take system-wide standardized tests. The following information reviews the nature of some of these types of tests:

I. Teacher-constructed subject matter tests
These tests vary in form and format with purpose from subject to subject and school to school.

II. System-wide standardized tests

A. Grade 10

1. Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS)

The CTBS is a seven part timed test administered to all students in grade ten. The test is given in the spring and yields a measure of school-wide student achievement. Students respond by selecting the "best" choice of several response options.

Subtests	Time (minutes)
Reading	
Vocabulary	11
Comprehension	35
Language	
Spelling	12
Mechanics	10
Expression	27
Mathematics	
Computation	40
Concepts/Applications	30

2. Maryland Functional Reading Test (MFRT)

The MFRT is a two part criterion referenced test. Students who graduate from a public school in the State of Maryland in or after June 1982 must achieve a specific level of attainment as a graduation requirement. Every student must be given at least four opportunities to achieve the specific level of attainment beginning with their enrollment in grade nine. Students respond by selecting the "best" choice of several response options.

Item Categories

1. Locating Information from Reference Sources
2. Understanding Forms
3. Gaining Information
4. Following Directions

3. Biology

The Biology test is a multiple choice objective referenced test administered to all students enrolled in (regular) biology. The test is designed to be administered in a single class period. Students respond by selecting the "best" choice of several response options. Random guessing should be discouraged even though no penalty is assessed for incorrect responses.

The results obtained are used to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum rather than to measure student achivement.

B. Grade 11

1. American History
Social Studies

These two tests are multiple choice objective referenced tests administered to all students enrolled in American History and/or some other social studies course. Most, but not all, students are in grade eleven. The Social Studies test is unique in that it uses a method called "matrix sampling." This means not all students answer the same set of questions. Rather, some fraction of the students answer some fraction of the items. The test is designed to be administered in a single class period. Students respond by selecting the "best" choice of several response options. Random guessing should be discouraged even though no penalty is assessed for incorrect responses.

Results obtained are used to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum rather than to measure student learning.

2. Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/
National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test
(PSAT/NMSQT)

A two hour version given during the school day of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) for guidance in grades 10-12 and scholarship testing in grade 11. The test yields three scores: verbal, mathematical, and a selection index for scholarship consideration by NMSC.

3. Scholastic Aptitude Test

See information below.

C. Grade 12

1. Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

The SAT is a two and one-half hour test which yields two separate scores -- verbal and mathematical. The mathe-

matical portion of the test measures students' problem-solving in arithmetic reasoning, elementary algebra, and geometry. The Verbal portion is designed to assess reading skills and understanding of word relationships.

Students should be advised against "wild guessing" because a penalty is imposed for incorrect answers. Students respond to the test items by selecting the "best" choice from several response options.

The SAT may be taken by second semester 11th grade or 12th grade students and is administered to a self-selected group of students who must pay for the opportunity to take the test. In addition to the basic test, students may select additional companion achievement tests in many different curriculum areas. A student receives a sample question booklet to review in the application packet.

2. Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)

Administered to a self-selecting group of students by the Department of Defense. The ASVAB is designed to "counsel" and to stimulate "student interest in the service job and training opportunities." The ASVAB consists of 9 subtests selected to represent common content among the military service classification batteries. There are 9 scores: coding speed, word knowledge, arithmetic reasoning, tool knowledge, space perception, mechanical comprehension, shop information, automotive information and electronic information. There are also 5 aptitude composite scores: general-technical, clerical, electronics, general mechanics, and motor mechanics.

3. Miscellaneous

There are other tests given in the senior high school -- such as -- tests for civil service applicants. Without direct access to these tests, no descriptive information is provided.

A Selected Sample of Standard Answer Sheets

Students who participate in system-wide standardized tests, respond to questions on a separate answer sheet. The form and format of these answer sheets vary according to the procedure and/or machine to be used for "scoring." Three types of "standard" answer sheets are presented in Appendix A.

Teacher Attitude for Effective Teaching of Test-Taking Skills Makes A Difference

A student's performance on any test may be elevated if a teacher can provide the incentive and motivation for that student. Tests will be given to students throughout their high school careers. The teacher can provide the key to these students who must be encouraged to achieve. If students know why they are being tested, what limitations tests have, and how they can approach test-taking positively, they will take tests and succeed.

I. Tests are a reality. They:

- A. determine academic placement
- B. determine college entrance
- C. determine armed service entrance
- D. determine employment
- E. are required by federal/state law

II. Standardized tests have limitations because:

- A. they are one of many measures of performance
- B. scores are open to misinterpretation
- C. results are open to misuse
- D. scores may have exaggerated effect.

III. Professional response can minimize effect of negative test characteristics on students. It is important that you:

- A. explain to students why they are being tested
- B. explain to them what will be done with the results
- C. explain to them what might happen to them as a result
- D. explain the importance of the best possible performance
- E. know that your attitude <u>projects</u> to students:
  1. what you say
  2. how you act
  3. how others say you act
- F. Know that it is important for students to approach the test on the test's terms.

Teacher Preparation for Test Administration

The teacher has a major role to perform in helping students to do well on any kind of test. It is helpful to prepare yourself ahead of the actual testing situation so that you can guide your students in their task. Following are some helpful hints in accomplishing this:

I. What Teachers Should Do Before And During Testing Sessions.

A. Test conditions and environment

1. Physical arrangements in the classroom:
   a. Arrange the desks so that students have to do their own work
   b. See that students clear their desks of everything other than testing materials
   c. Be prepared with fairly dull #2 pencils. (They last longer, don't break easily, and require fewer strokes.)
   d. Place an accurate clock for timing purposes in the view of all test takers.
   e. Post a "DO NOT DISTURB" sign on the classroom door(s).
   f. Avoid any distractions that break students' concentration and might keep them from doing their best

2. Time schedule
   a. Before test day, be absolutely sure you are familiar with how much time must be allotted for:
      . Passing out test materials
      . Giving test directions
      . Completing the test
      . Collecting test materials

   b. Add it all together and proceed accordingly. Your calm efficiency will help create a positive testing environment

3. Teacher circulation
   a. During the testing sessions, walk about the room checking to be sure that students are:
      . Working in the correct section of the test booklet
      . Marking on the correct section of the answer sheet
      . Making the black marks correctly
      . Working until they reach the end of a test section
      . <u>Not</u> turning to other sections of the test booklet to look at material that will be tested later

   b. Teacher circulation helps to familiarize students with the test-proctor situation that many of them will meet later in other testing circumstances

C. The Importance of the Test

1. Why the test is given
   a. Be sure you understand why the students are required to take the test. Is it a teacher requirement, a department requirement, a school, county, or a state requirement?

2. How the test results are used
   a. Find out the ways the test scores will be used. Your test coordinator, guidance counselors, and principal can give you that information. Some examples might be:

      . Determine how a student compares with others in his grade
      . Use as a criteria for placement
      . Help determine subjects students may take
      . Find out how much a student has improved
      . Find out what a student doesn't know
      . Pinpoint areas in which students may need additional help
      . Give parents a report of student achievement
      . Use to fulfill a graduation requirement

3. A positive attitude about testing
   a. Your positive attitude about the importance of the testing is very important: stimulating your students to do their best is your responsibility

   b. If you understand the hows and whys of the testing, your attitude will help to impart an appropriate sense of test importance to the students

II. How To Prepare Your Students For Taking Tests

A. Test-Taking simulation - Provide practice in the following areas using teacher made tests and answer sheets.

1. Tests - Vary types of teacher made tests to simulate.
   a. Objective
   b. Analogy
   c. Vocabulary - Ask student to find the word most like the keyword
   d. Proofreading to find errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation and usage.
   e. Practice map reading, using graphs and tables and reference materials.

2. Answer sheets - Give practice in mechanics of:
   a. Marking answer sheets
   b. Keeping place in booklet
   c. Avoiding stray marks

B. Test Format

1. Directions
   a. Read through the test directions beforehand so that on test day you can give the directions in a precise, natural way
   b. The test manual specifies the exact directions you are to use. This is an important factor in the standardization of tests. Follow the directions. (Any tips about test-taking techniques, etc., should be given before test day.)

2. Vocabulary
   a. It is extremely helpful to review the vocabulary of test directions and test questions with your students. Examples might be:
      . Choose one of the four transition words listed for each item
      . Decide in what order the four sentences should be put to make the best paragraph
      . Which concept represents .....
      . Which statement supports .....
      . What does the word convey .....
      . Which statement emphasizes .....
      . What treatment is recommended .....
      . Maximum/Minimum
      . Adequate/Inadequate
      . Estimate .....

   b. When students are familiar with testing vocabulary they can spend the test-taking time figuring out the answers to the questions rather than puzzling over the directions or wondering what the questions are asking.

Teachers in all disciplines will find it extremely valuable to the student if classroom activities are provided frequently to reinforce their understanding of test vocabulary.

3. Types of tests
   a. Read through the test beforehand so that you can discuss the test-type with your students in terms of:
      . Level of difficulty
      . Timed/Untimed
      . Short/Long
      . True/False
      . Matching
      . Completion/Short Answer
      . Essay

   b. The more preparation/familiarization students have about the kind of test they will be taking, the less anxious they will become about the testing session.

3. Timing - Give practice in managing time:
   a. Pacing
   b. Answering easiest test items first
   c. Checking over test answers

4. Directions for tests - Encourage students to:
   a. Ask questions until they know what to do
   b. Stay calm, think positively and don't give up

5. Oral and written group instruction - Give practice in:
   a. Following oral test directions
   b. Following written test directions

6. Guessing - Develop guessing strategies:
   a. Eliminate inappropriate test choices
   b. Anticipate most logical answer
   c. Use clues to locate most precise or literal answer
   d. Clues in other items

B. Testing vocabulary - Give review of the vocabulary of test directions.

C. Whys of test taking and how results will be used. Tell students:

1. Why they are taking the tests
2. How the results will be used
3. How the tests are scored

D. Approaching Test Items - Teach students to:

1. Identify key words in test passages
2. Use key words to locate tests answers
3. Read questions before reading passage
4. Reasoning from information given in a test item
5. Determining precisely what is asked in a test question and what information is given

Pupil Preparation For Tests

Students are often surprised and dismayed by the variety and complexity of tests they take for classroom achievement, placement purposes, selection into jobs, or additional training. It is important, therefore, to be as aware of test-taking skills as it is the content subject matter of any discipline. Included in this section are some helpful hints to help prepare for taking tests.

I. Understand why you are taking the particular test and how the results will be used.

- A. Tests can indicate how a student compares with others in the same grade.
- B. Tests can indicate how much a student has improved.
- C. Tests can help teachers find out strengths and weaknesses to help plan for individual instruction.
- D. Tests can be used to help administrators and teachers make decisions about proper class placement.
- E. Tests can help students gain knowledge about their strengths and weaknesses and be helpful in planning future schooling.

II. Be prepared physically since poor physical condition can lower your mental efficiency.

- A. Get a good night's sleep before the test.
- B. Eat a good breakfast.
- C. Wear comfortable clothes.
- D. If you wear glasses, remember to bring them.
- E. Relax occasionally during the test.

III. Be prepared mentally.

- A. Try to relax.
  1. Stay calm.
  2. A little concern and nervousness over taking a test are not unusual.
- B. Think positively, don't give up.
  1. Some tests are easy, some are difficult.
  2. Some tests are short, some are long.
  3. It is rare for anyone to get every answer correct.
  4. Don't worry about questions you can't answer.

IV. Be sure you understand test instructions.

- A. Listen to oral instructions carefully.
- B. Read written test directions fully and carefully before answering questions.
  1. Directions may change for different sections.
  2. It is sometimes necessary to reread directions before starting.
  3. Know whether there is a penalty for guessing.

V. Budget your time wisely.

A. Know how much time is allowed.
B. Scan test for content and length so you can plan timing strategy.
C. Work steadily and quickly.
D. Answer questions you are sure about first.
E. Skip difficult questions; return to them if time permits.
F. Don't spend too much time puzzling over questions you don't understand.
G. Check answers if time permits.

1. Look over answers to see if you have made silly mistakes.
2. Do not change answers unless you are sure the change is correct; your first hunch is apt to be right if you understand the question the first time.
3. Check for item left blank and guess if appropriate to do so (if there is no penalty for guessing).

VI. Understand the mechanics of marking the test answer sheet.

A. Keep answer sheet on side of test booklet near the hand you write with to avoid having to reach across the booklet.
B. Make "quick marks" on answer sheet.
C. Avoid stray marks on answer sheet.
D. Erase answers completely when changing them.
E. Be sure to keep your place in the test booklet and on answer sheet; if you skip a question on the test, be sure to skip corresponding space on answer sheet.
F. Mark no more than one answer on a single multiple choice question.

VII. Use helpful hints in answering questions.

A. Look for key words in passages. If you skim too rapidly, you may miss the "clue".
B. Distinguish between similar appearing words since well-constructed tests always contain a few attractive wrong answers.
C. Watch out for negatives and double negatives.
D. To weed out unnecessary information as you read, focus on command or questions at the end of each item.
E. Use built-in clues (wrong parts of speech; wrong units of measure).
F. Look for answer in same form as question.
G. Read each choice before making answer.
H. Estimate an answer in math before actually working the example to find if your answer is reasonable.
I. Be cautious about absolute statements (always, never, etc.).
J. Try to anticipate the most logical test answers.
K. Look for clues in items which may help answer another item.

VIII. In answering reading comprehension test questions, select one of the two major options.

1. Option I
   Read questions first, then read selection.
2. Option II
   Skim passage; then read questions; and finally, search for answer in passages.

COMMON KEY-WORDS USED IN ESSAY QUESTIONS

Compare — When you are asked to compare, you should examine qualities, or characteristics, in order to discover resemblances. The term compare is usually stated as compare with, and it implies that you are to emphasize similarities, although differences may be mentioned.

Contrast — When you are instructed to contrast, you should stress dissimilarities, differences, or unlikeness or associated things, qualities, events or problems.

Criticize — In a criticism you should express your judgment with respect to the correctness or merit of the factors under consideration. You are expected to give the results of your own analysis and to discuss both limitations and good points.

Define — Definitions call for concise, clear, authoritative meanings. In such statements, details are seldom required, but boundaries or limitations of the definition should be briefly cited. You must keep in mind the class to which the item to be defined belongs, and whatever differentiates it from all other classes.

Diagram — In a question which specifies a diagram, you should present a drawing, chart, plan, or other graphic representation in your answer. Generally the student is also expected to label the diagram and in some cases to add a brief explanation or description of it.

Discuss — The term discuss, which appears often in essay questions, directs you to examine, analyze carefully, and present considerations pro and con regarding the problems or items involved. This type of question calls for a complete and detailed answer.

Enumerate — The word enumerate specifies a list or outline form of reply. In such questions you should recount, one by one, in concise form, the points required.

Evaluate — In an evaluation question you are expected to present a careful appraisal, stressing both advantages and limitations. Evaluation implies authoritative and, to a lesser degree, personal appraisal.

Explain — In explanatory answers it is imperative that you clarify, elucidate, and interpret the material you present. In such an answer it is best to state the "how" and "why", reconcile any differences in opinion or experimental results, and, where possible, state causes. The aim is to make plain the conditions which give rise to whatever you are examining.

Illustrate	A question which asks you to illustrate usually requires you to explain or clarify your answer to the problem by presenting a figure, diagram, or concrete example.
Interpret	An interpretation question is similar to one requiring explanation. You are expected to translate, exemplify; solve or comment upon the subject and usually to give your judgment or reaction to the problem.
Justify	When you are instructed to justify your answer, you must prove, or show grounds, for, decisions. In such an answer, evidence should be presented in convincing form.
List	Listing is similar to enumeration. You are expected in such questions to present an itemized series or a tabulation. Such answers should always be concise.
Outline	An outline answer is organized description. You should give main points and essential supplementary materials, omit minor details, and present the information in a systematic arrangement or classification.
Prove	A question which requires proof is one which demands confirmation or verification. In such discussions you should establish something with certainty, by evaluating and citing experimental evidence, or by logical reasoning, with sufficient example.
Relate	In a question which asks you to show the relationship or to relate your answer should emphasize connections and associations, usually in descriptive form.
Review	A review usually specifies a critical examination. You should analyze and comment briefly, in organized sequence, upon the major points of the problem. Sometimes, however, a review question simply asks for a list.
State	In questions which direct you to specify, give, state, or present, you are called upon to express the high points in brief statements.
Summarize	When you are asked to summarize or present a summary, you should give in condensed form the main points or facts. All details, illustration, and elaboration are to be omitted.
Trace	When a question asks you to trace a course of events, you are to give a description of progress, historical sequence, or development from the point of origin. Such questions may call for probing or for deductions.

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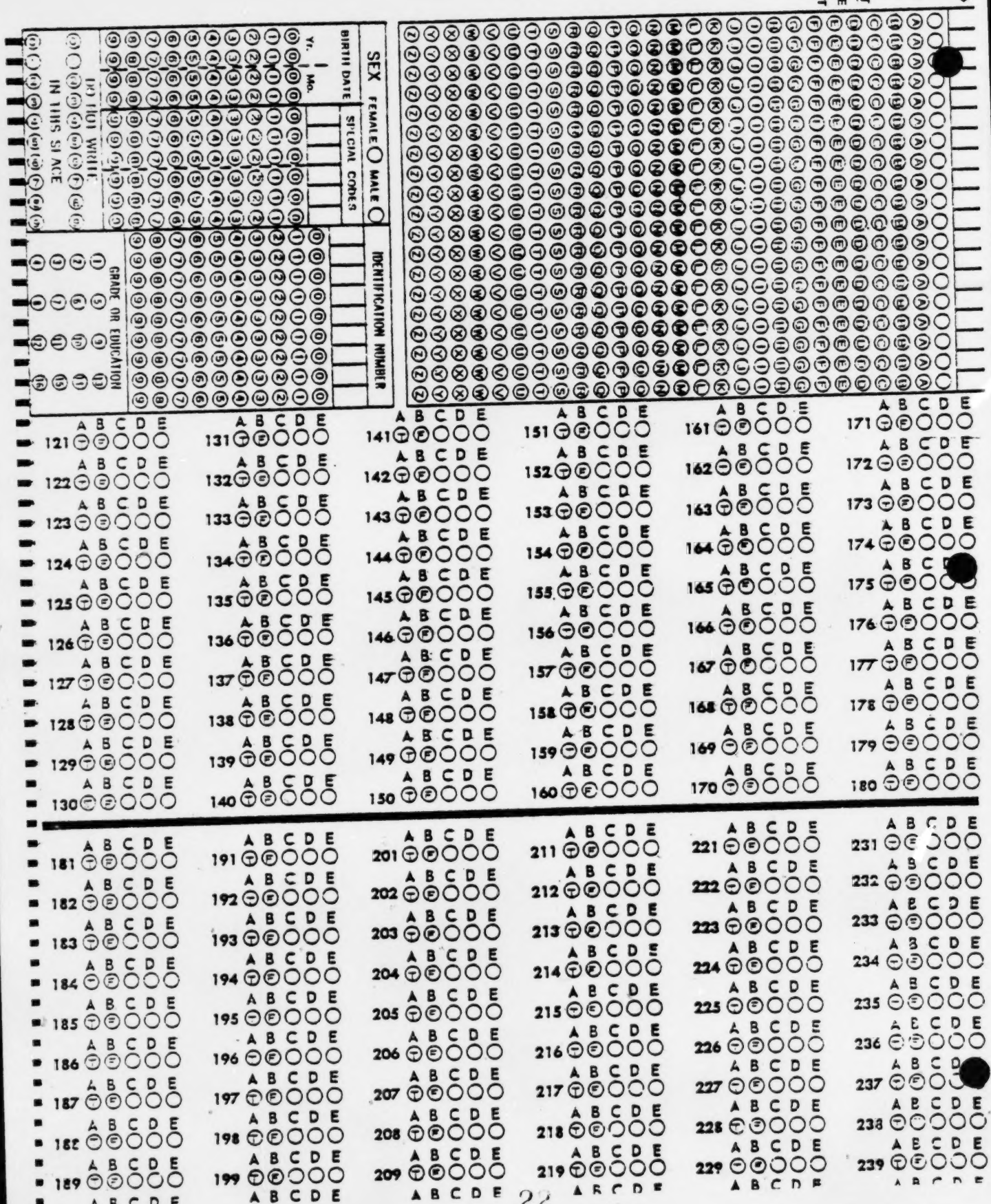
Appendix A

Samples of Answer Sheets

Answer Sheet "Differential Aptitude Tests Verbal Reasoning" Forms S and T--Copyright © 1973 by The Psychological Corporation was removed due to copyright restrictions.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PUPIL

SCHOOL

TEACHER

GRADE LEVEL — DATE OF TEST

TEST — FORM

PUPIL NUMBER GRID

TEST NUMBER GRID

SCHOOL NUMBER GRID

USE NO. 2 PENCIL ONLY — ERASE ALL ERRORS COMPLETELY

VOCABULARY

(Page 3) SAMPLE 0

(Page 4) LEVEL II

24 25 26 27 28

29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66

SPELLING

(Page 27) SAMPLE S1 S2

(Page 28) LEVEL II

24 25 26 27 28

29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66

CAPITALIZATION

(Page 31) SAMPLE S1 S2 S3

(Page 33) LEVEL II

19 20 21 22

23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58

PUNCTUATION

(Page 37) SAMPLE S1 S2 S3

(Page 39) LEVEL II

19 20 21 22

23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58

Appendix B

Selected Bibliography

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY - TEST TAKING SKILLS

MATERIALS LOCATED IN THE SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER AND/OR GUIDANCE OFFICE

PLEASE ASK THE SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALIST FOR ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

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Appendix C

Evaluation

Improving Student Test Taking Skills

School Self Evaluation

Yes	No		
___	___	1.	The school has a test coordinator.
___	___	2.	Teachers are adequately prepared to administer each standardized test given during each school year.
___	___	3.	Parents are informed prior to testing and asked to cooperate.
___	___	4.	Students are adequately prepared to take each standardized test.
___	___	5.	Teachers prepare test taking simulations and provide practice for students to deal with the mechanics of recording answers.
___	___	6.	Test results are adequately utilized to analyze student strengths, to diagnose student needs, and to aid in future planning. (groups, not individuals)
___	___	7.	An item analysis is made for appropriate standardized tests.
___	___	8.	Results of all standardized tests are shared with the entire staff.
___	___	9.	Results of appropriate standardized tests are shared with parents.
___	___	10.	Systematic follow up occurs with the results of standardized testing.
___	___	11.	Recent inservice has been devoted to the improvement of student test taking skills.
___	___	12.	The school has an action plan for testing which incorporates the previous items as appropriate.

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Teacher Checklist

I. Do I prepare myself and the setting for testing by:

A. Familiarizing myself with the directions for administration of a test (what I should do and what I shouldn't do)

B. Knowing the characteristics of my students and which students might:

- be afraid of test situations
- have difficulty handling test booklet and answer sheets
- have difficulty budgeting time
- be overly concerned with unimportant details
- find it difficult to skip questions and return to them later
- erase completely through paper or break several pencil points
- become ill during the test session due to anxiety

C. Creating a supporting environment

- providing appropriate physical conditions (amount of light, temperature, noise level, space between seats)
- necessary provisions for left-handed students have been made
- extra pencils, scrap paper, erasers are readily available

D. Posting a DO NOT DISTURB sign to avoid interruptions

II. Have I prepared my students to take tests by:

A. Telling students why they are taking the tests
B. Telling students how the results will be used
C. Telling students how the tests are scored
D. Training my students to take tests

- how to be prepared physically and mentally
- how to use time wisely
- how to read directions and questions
- how to record answers
- how to follow general procedures during testing situations

E. Training my students in the specific thinking skills required on the test
F. Helping students understand my role as teacher during the testing situation
G. Checking to see that students:

- work in correct section of test booklet
- mark correct section of answer sheet

. make marks correctly
. see that students work until they reach end of section for their level

III. Have I encouraged students to:

A. Be ready physically, mentally, emotionally

1. Get plenty of rest
2. Wear glasses if appropriate
3. Try to stay calm and not give up
4. Think positively

. some tests are easy, some are difficult
. some start easy and become difficult
. some are short; some long
. rare for anyone to get every answer correct
. not to worry about questions they can't answer

5. Ask questions until you know what to do.

B. Use time wisely

. students should try to work steadily and quickly
. understand that reading to answer specific questions is a different task from reading for content mastery
. should first answer the questions they are sure about
. should check answers if there is time
. should not sharpen pencils during a test
. should know how much time is allowed

C. Listen to instructions and read directions and questions carefully

. listen to oral instructions carefully
. read written directions carefully and fully before answering questions
. review of the vocabulary of test directions beforehand

D. Choose and record responses

. decide whether all answer options must be read before selecting the correct one
. understand the proper way to mark answers
. practice the procedure for answering questions